

THE APPEAL

2023 IMPACT REPORT

**The Appeal is a nonprofit newsroom
that envisions a world in which
systems of support and care, not
punishment, create public safety.**

The Appeal's journalism:

Exposes the harms of a criminal legal system entrenched in centuries of systemic racism.

Equips people with the information necessary to make change.

Elevates solutions that emerge from the communities most affected by policing, jails, and prisons in the U.S.



Roland Harris at a memorial to victims of Phoenix police violence. *Photo shared by Poder in Action.*

INVESTIGATIONS THAT SPUR COMMUNITIES INTO ACTION

On Jan. 11, 2019, a Phoenix police officer shot 19-year-old Jacob Harris in the back as he ran away from police after allegedly robbing a restaurant.

The officer who killed Harris was cleared of any wrongdoing by police and prosecutors. Instead, they charged Harris's three friends—aged 14, 19, and 20 at the time—with his murder under Arizona's felony murder law, which allows people to be charged with murder if someone dies during the commission of a felony.

Last year, Jacob's grieving father, Roland, reached out to Senior Reporter Meg O'Connor for help seeking justice. The respect and care with which O'Connor previously covered Jacob's story encouraged Roland to share an important new piece of evidence: video footage of the killing recorded from a police aircraft.

The horrific footage set O'Connor off to find out why police weren't held accountable for the brutal killing. She uncovered thousands of pages of records showing that police and prosecutors relied on inconsistent, misleading, and sometimes outright false statements. Police deleted relevant text messages, and thermal footage contradicted the department's version of events.

When *The Appeal* hit publish, in partnership with local outlet Phoenix New Times, it ignited a firestorm of outrage and quickly became our most-read article ever.

National media outlets cited the investigation and it was featured by Apple News and Longreads. O'Connor and Roland appeared on radio shows reaching millions and a documentary producer has expressed interest in the case.

The *Appeal's* reporting on Jacob Harris also spurred grassroots activism. A nonprofit that supports police violence victims organized a demonstration to demand the release of Harris's friends, raise money for the families, and call attention to the need for policy changes.

Community groups, including Black Lives Matter Phoenix, Black Lives Matter LA, and Poder in Action, formed the Justice for Jacob and Free the Phoenix Three coalitions to support Roland and Harris's three friends. The coalitions held demonstrations and press conferences, which have been covered by local press, and have met with U.S. Department of Justice officials—who have read *The Appeal's* coverage of Harris's killing—to discuss their request for an investigation into Harris's death.

O'Connor's investigation showcases the impact of *The Appeal's* journalism that consistently holds power to account, inspires community action, helps individuals, and influences the media's narratives—together driving real change.

AUDIENCE

Newsletter

16,000

subscribers

40%

increase from 2022

Social Media

9 million

X / Twitter impressions



Audience survey results

Reader Feedback

The coverage you bring is so important and accessible to people who do not read about and think about the legal system every day.

It's so incredibly important that we have journalists writing about the real-life impact of these cases. Thank you for your reporting!

JOURNALISM



The Appeal [is] not only changing how incarcerated folks are portrayed in journalism, but how they participate, and most importantly, lead.

— INN Awards Judge

160+

articles & newsletters

50%

growth from 2022



70

writers

43%

BIPOC

27%

formerly /
incarcerated

IMPACTED WRITERS



In 2023, The Appeal welcomed its first Contributing Editor Christopher Blackwell, who is incarcerated in Washington State.

Our work with incarcerated writers this year won:

- Breaking Barriers Award by Institute for Nonprofit News
- Community Engagement Award by LION Publishers

As an incarcerated writer, it isn't always easy to get my voice in spaces that can educate society to affect change around the carceral system. The Appeal has strived to offer me this platform. They have worked diligently to find ways to empower my voice along with countless other impacted people.

— Contributing Editor Christopher Blackwell

19
currently or formerly
incarcerated writers
created:

1/3
newsletter columns

+
18%
articles

I have been getting some pretty amazing feedback on the article. [Department of Corrections officials] want to talk with me more about the specific needs of long time prisoners!

— The Appeal writer Nick Hacheney

Drove Changes

- Blackwell wrote a powerful essay with his wife, Chelsea Moore, about the obstacles he faces in his fight for post-conviction relief and the need for a proposed bill in Washington State to repeal the practice of using prior juvenile adjudications to enhance sentences in adult court. Blackwell's reporting contributed to growing public support for the bill, which was later passed and signed by the governor in a ceremony attended by Blackwell's wife.
- In New York City, the Board of Correction rejected a proposal to ban paper mail at the Rikers Island Jail Complex. The ban was opposed by local and state officials and advocacy groups, with some officials citing The Appeal's commentary by David Campbell, who spent time at Rikers. Campbell wrote that paper mail "is one of the few things that keeps prisoners feeling human."

TRACKING IMPACT

The Appeal seeks to catalyze change in the U.S. criminal legal system and, to measure this, tracks the impact of all our work. We define our impact as changes that reduce harm at a large, systemic scale; directly improve individual lives; or shift public discourse—as well as significant steps towards these changes.

We track four key areas of impact: Individual, Community, Institutional, and Media.

180
impacts

Top Impacts

Individual

WOMEN REPORT 'RAMPANT' SEXUAL ABUSE AT FEDERAL PRISON WHERE GHISLAINE MAXWELL IS HELD



Community

POLICE KILLED HIS SON. PROSECUTORS CHARGED THE TEEN'S FRIENDS WITH HIS MURDER.



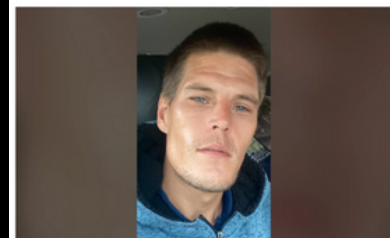
Institutional

LOUISIANA IMPRISONS CHILDREN IN A FORMER DEATH ROW UNIT. THE KIDS SAY IT HAUNTS THEM.

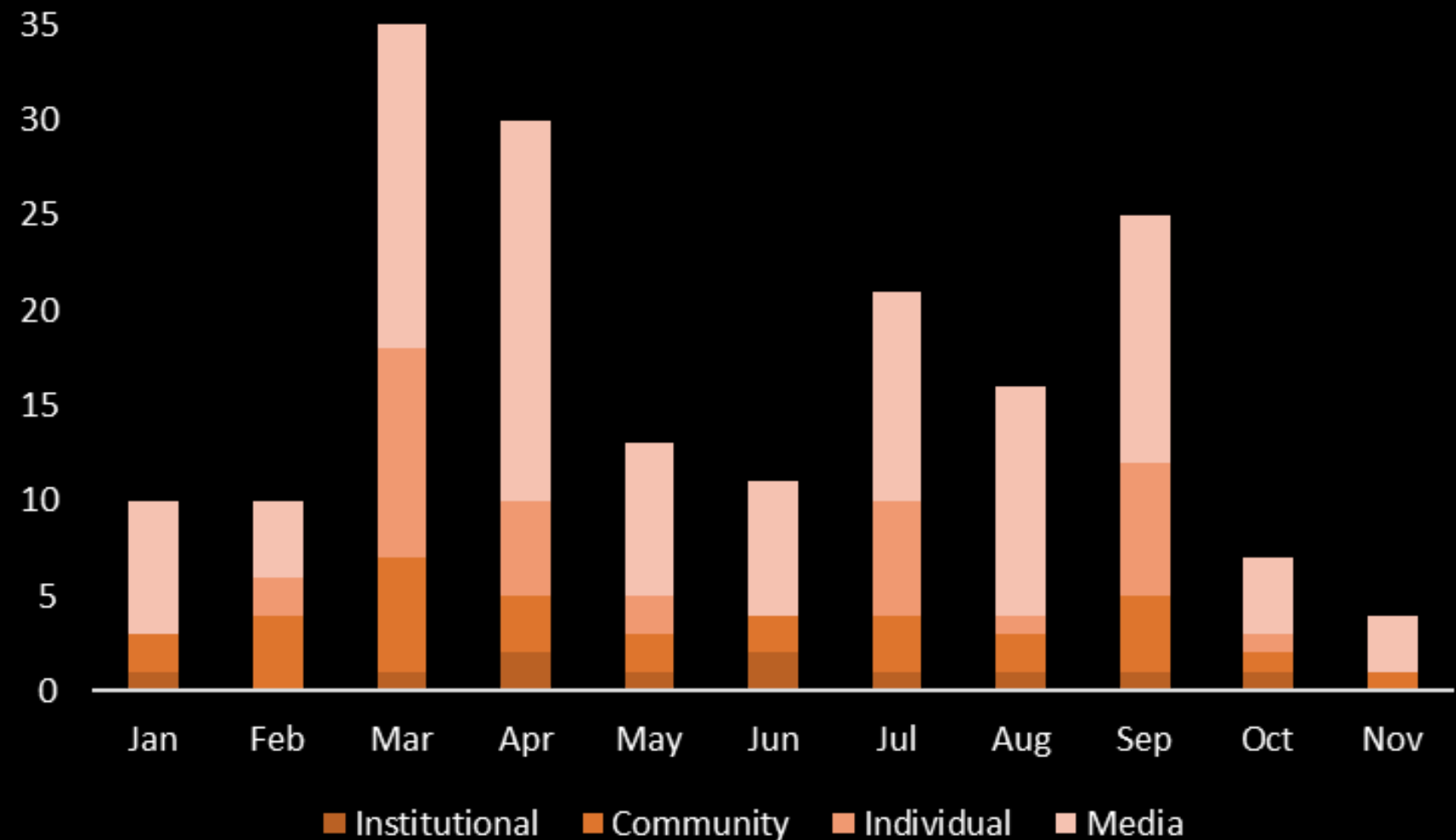


Media

GEORGIA MAN BEGGED FOR MEDICAL CARE FOR MONTHS BEFORE DYING IN JAIL, REPORT FINDS



2023 Impacts



BIGGEST IMPACTS

Alternatives

A pre-arrest diversion program in Fulton County, Georgia, will continue uninterrupted, keeping hundreds of people out of the county's overcrowded jails. The Appeal's reporting helped raise awareness of the issue ahead of a public meeting where dozens of local residents voiced their support for the program and pushed county officials to backtrack on threats to cut funding. Clara Totenberg Green, then-community engagement manager at PAD (Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative), said, "The Appeal's reporting on the horrific conditions inside the Fulton County jail in Atlanta had a major impact on the debate in our city regarding the expansion of the jail ... Their pieces were widely shared, referenced by advocates and policymakers alike, and shone light on a story that is too often ignored."

Prison Conditions

In a yearlong investigation, women incarcerated at FCI Tallahassee—the federal women's prison in Florida—told freelance reporter Silja J.A. Talvi they have been subjected to a culture of rampant sexual abuse, retaliation, and cover-up. Our reporting contradicted coverage depicting the institution as a cushy "Club Fed." The response to this groundbreaking investigation was swift and overwhelming. In June, U.S. Department of Justice officials visited FCI Tallahassee as part of a broader probe into systemic issues of sex abuse in federal prisons. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) cited The Appeal's investigation in a letter calling on members of Congress to support the Federal Prison Oversight Act. This reporting was a finalist for a Best Investigative Journalism Award from the Institute for Nonprofit News.

Juvenile Justice

Senior Reporter Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg's reporting on Louisiana's decision to incarcerate kids in Angola prison's former Death Row unit uncovered crucial details about the children's medical care. This reporting was cited in an ACLU lawsuit on behalf of the incarcerated children. The Southern Poverty Law Center also cited our coverage in a letter calling for a U.S. Department of Education investigation. In September, all children were transferred out of the facility after a judge ordered their removal.

Immigration

Earlier this year, freelance reporter Victoria Law exposed how the U.S. government was planning to deport dozens of immigrant women who were targeted by prison staff in a notorious sexual abuse scandal at a federal facility in California. At the time of publication, at least 26 women faced deportation and 11 had already been deported. In response to public pressure and The Appeal's coverage, ICE agreed to release one of the women interviewed by The Appeal.

1

person released

2

diversion programs continued

3

prison & jail investigations

SHAPING THE NARRATIVE

30 outlets republished or cited The Appeal

Los Angeles Times

teen VOGUE

The Guardian

POLITICO

Local Outlets

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

RIFT RIVERFRONT TIMES

BOSTON.COM

wbur

94.1 KPFA KPFA.ORG

THE CLAYTON CRESCENT

NEVADA CURRENT

WNYC

WASHINGTONIAN

LA ist

Police Reporting

Senior Reporter Meg O'Connor spoke at the Association of Alternative Newsmedia's conference on reimagining police and crime coverage by local news in ways that are anti-racist and people-centered. O'Connor taught attendees how to move away from traditional crime coverage and instead hold police, prosecutors, and judges to account.

Justice Data

Research and Projects Editor Ethan Corey ran a panel on "Making Sense of Criminal Justice Data" at NICAR, the annual data journalism conference by Investigative Reporters and Editors. Corey teamed up with colleagues at The Marshall Project and Big Local News to help reporters from across the country avoid common misinterpretations and take a more nuanced approach to crime statistics.

Trans Rights

Freelance writer Adam Rhodes' early and consistent coverage of coordinated attempts to criminalize trans people helped shape coverage in national and local media outlets.

PUBLISHING PARTNERS



PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT



EMPOWERMENT Ave



Local Outlets



Wisconsin Watch



AWARDS

Winner



Community Engagement

“The Appeal demonstrates a deep and unwavering understanding of the identities and needs of their audience. Their deliberate efforts to amplify the voices of incarcerated journalists and writers showcase a genuine commitment to authentic representation.”



Breaking Barriers

“[Christopher Blackwell] has become a vital voice for the incarcerated. His coverage for The Appeal secured one man’s chance at post-conviction relief and contributed to growing support for a halt in the use of juvenile records to enhance sentences in adult courts.”

Finalist



LION Business of the Year



Operational Resilience



Best Investigative Journalism



Best Feature

OUR TEAM & SUPPORTERS

LEADERSHIP

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Molly Greene
Strategy & Legal Director

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Jerry Iannelli

Meg O'Connor

Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg

Nick Wing

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Christopher Blackwell

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700+ individual donors

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